



**NJACCRRRA**

# *Early Care Issues*

## **Revising NJ's Child Care Regulations to Support Healthier Childhood Behaviors**

**ISSUE:** New Jersey has the highest obesity rate in the nation among low-income children between two and five years of age.<sup>1</sup> Overweight and obesity are complex health problems with many contributing factors, including poor eating patterns, less physical activity, and financial pressures to minimize food costs. Weight gain places young children at risk for several chronic and devastating health issues, including depression, bullying, cardiac disease, and Type II diabetes. **Since behaviors around eating and physical activity are developed early in childhood, regulations within the state's early care system that guide healthy practices could help prevent obesity among very young children.**

Approximately 25 million U.S. children are obese or overweight. Childhood obesity rates have more than tripled since 1980,<sup>2</sup> with an alarming disparity among children of color and children from low-income families. Nearly one out of every three New Jersey children ages 10-17 are overweight or obese<sup>3</sup> and ten percent of high school students are obese.<sup>4</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION:** Child care settings can be a major influence on a children's dietary intake, physical activity, and energy balance. While numerous states lack specific nutrition and physical activity regulations related to childhood obesity for child care facilities, if implemented, state regulations could help address the obesity epidemic in young children in the United States. **To this end, NJACCRRRA is calling for revisions to child care regulations that would support healthier childhood behaviors, including those that would guide how providers support good nutrition, promote physical activity, limit television and computer viewing, and promote breastfeeding.**

NJACCRRRA is looking for child care regulations to require that child care programs serve food that meets USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program standards recommendations, require children to participate in structured sessions of vigorous physical activity, strictly limit a child's television and computer time and prohibit viewing for children under the age of two, and promote breastfeeding by encouraging its practice and providing special arrangements for storage.

These recommendations come in response to concerns over nutritional and exercise habits affecting young persons today. One-third of New Jersey high school students watch television for 3 or more hours on an average school day.<sup>5</sup> Only three out of four New Jersey mothers have ever breastfed their children, and only 10% of mothers breastfeed their children exclusively for 6 months.<sup>6</sup>

**NJACCRRRA's recommendations to the New Jersey child care regulations include specific guidelines that would:**

- ✓ Strictly limit a child's television viewing time and prohibit viewing for children under the age of two.
- ✓ Limit computer use in minimum increments, except for school-age children completing homework or supervised enrichment activities.
- ✓ Specify how much time children in child care should spend being physical and encouraged in vigorous activity that alternates between child-led and teacher-led activities.
- ✓ Require daily outdoor play when weather/environmental conditions do not pose risk.
- ✓ Limit the time a child participates in seated activities (excluding sleeping or eating.)
- ✓ Prohibit withholding of active play as a punishment.
- ✓ Require that children with special needs be provided opportunities for active play.
- ✓ Allow children access to self-serve water throughout the day.
- ✓ Serve only one juice beverage per day, and require that it is 100 percent fruit, void of sugar sweetener or artificial sweeteners, and not given to children younger than one year of age.
- ✓ Prohibit solid food for infants less than six months of age unless instructed by the child's health care provider.
- ✓ Serve foods that include a variety of fruits and vegetables, contain a high proportion of whole grains, and are limited in solid fats, added sugar, trans fats, and sodium.
- ✓ Require healthy snacks for special occasions and classroom cooking activities.
- ✓ Ensure that all food is in accordance with minimum USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) standards including portion size and nutritional value.
- ✓ Encourage, provide arrangements for, and support breastfeeding.

To view more specific and complete information about these recommended revisions and other issues related to the health, safety and well-being of children in New Jersey's child care system, visit [www.njaccrra.org](http://www.njaccrra.org).

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<sup>1</sup> Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Centers for Disease Control. 1999-2009. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/brfss/index.htm>

<sup>2</sup> National Center for Health Statistics. *Press Release: Obesity Still a Major Problem*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 14, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> National Survey of Children's Health. NSCH 2007. Child and Adolescent Health measurement Initiative, Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health. Available at: <http://www.nschdata.org>

<sup>4</sup> 2009 New Jersey Student Health Survey. New Jersey Department of Education. Available at <http://www.nj.gov/njded/students/yrbs/index.htm>

<sup>5</sup> 2009 New Jersey Student Health Survey. New Jersey Department of Education. Available at <http://www.nj.gov/njded/students/yrbs/index.htm>

<sup>6</sup> National Immunization Survey. National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Centers for Disease Control. 2007. Available at: [http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/data/NIS\\_data/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/data/NIS_data/index.htm)